

Al-Gahazali's Thoughts on the Effects of Music and Singing upon the Heart and the Body and their Impact on Present-Day Malaysian Society

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Abstract

Al-Gahzali (1058-1111) wrote his essay on ‘Music and Singing’ to clarify his thoughts on the Effects of Music and Singing upon the Heart and the Body. He criticizes listening to music and singing because they are associated with gatherings where wine is drunk and lustful entertainment is deliberately provoked. The only kind of music and singing to be allowed is that of religious and heroic songs and modest pieces. In his opinion, an excess of music and singing should be avoided. The same is said of dancing, which may be practised or watched as long as it does not arouse desire and aims at encouraging sinful acts. Over the centuries, Al-Ghazali’s thoughts circulated among the ‘learned’ in the Muslim communities of present-day Malaysia. As one result, specific ideas were shaped on the relatedness between music, singing, dance on the one hand and heart and body on the other. This paper focuses on the impact of these ideas on the understanding of a culturally defined permissibility of musical embodiment. Moreover, actual changes through global knowledge access and through social contradictions within the multi-cultural Malaysian society are discussed employing an epistemological approach to key terms such as ecstasy, sin, control, fear, sorrow and joy.

Keywords: Sunnite Islam, performance practice, musical embodiment, permissibility, religious categories of music effects

Introduction – Some Thoughts on the Musical World before the Expansion of World Religions

The news provider AFP reported recently on a special mummy found in the Egyptian Valley of Kings. Finding mummies in a valley where mummies are the main attraction might not be a big thing, but finding a female singer who was definitely not a member of the royal family in the Valley of the Kings is more than surprising.¹ She might be the daughter of a Priest devoted to Amun and as such she could be an important person, but she was not a princess.

Obviously, the times before the development of world religions have been retrospectively far more transgressive in terms of social and cultural hierarchies. Seen from the viewpoint of later social developments, hierarchies were “in order” only locally. The wider “disorder” as for example represented in the multilayered presentation of deities throughout the ancient Babylonian, Akkadian and Sumerian period of Mesopotamia might have been a strong reason to establish more comprehensive religious systems. Disorder – as perceived by expansive rulers – endangered power and control, and supposedly weakened economic developments. However, gender issues and social hierarchies experienced dramatic changes in the following periods, if we take the initial situation into consideration.

In another study, it was analysed that the sharing of characters among the gods and goddesses known to the Mesopotamian society was very conspicuous. Male duties in the world of gods were almost emotionally indifferent. They appear as responsible for duties, which cannot be influenced by human will, such as the sun, the moon, weather, plagues, fate, and war. Female duties seem to compensate the lack of modelling power. We find emotionally significant subjects such as love, discord, wisdom, desolation, and agricultural plants, the explicit well of Mesopotamia’s civilisation, on which human work had a demonstrable influence. (Jähnichen, 2011: 183). Gender issues in pre-religious cultures affected regional diversity in many aspects.

In contrast to present-day perception of pre-religious ideologies, for example, the individuation of female musicians – especially young female musicians – is confirmed through manuscripts about economic issues at the palace of Mari in Mesopotamia. There, entries can be found on “twelve female...young musicians” and on “allowances for ninety new female musicians” (*Revue d'assyriologie et d'archéologie orientale* 50, 1956, p. 69, II, line 24). Not only musicians in the rank of servants or slaves, also female head musicians are proven. One of the cult arrangement edicts of the King Assurbanipal whose highly rendered homage consists of a prescription which advises the highest ranked female singer – the *Nargallatu* – to have a chant solo coming with the climax of the ceremony (Jähnichen, 2011: 183).

With the later establishment of religious systems that prescribed gender roles through fixing the centre of beliefs within the family structure, gender order became an interpenetrating element of social ideology. Most effective under this aspect was the development of Christian Catholicism on the one hand and of Islam on the other hand. This study is to investigate into the consequences of one high ranking authority's – Imam Al-Ghazali's – writings on music and singing that date back into the 11th century for the present-day musical life in Malaysia, a culturally and religiously diverse country of young age. The historical bridge of nearly thousand years is the spread and strict maintenance of the Sunnite Islam among the Malay community, which enjoys a special status within this country. Referring to Persia as an early parallel case (Lucas, 2012), Al-Ghazali's writings indicate a systematic understanding of the effects of music and singing as “humanly organized sound that embodies the unique cosmological, political, and spiritual concerns of Muslims” (*ibid*: 91). In the context of multi-cultural Malaysia, these concerns must be set into relation of cultural and religious diversity that offers little space for overlapping communication, if these concerns remain without re-thinking in a globally involved society.

The position of Al-Ghazali in his Time

Al-Ghazali, standing historically between Avicenna and Averroes at the end of the Abassids' Empire, is considered as one of the most influential Muslim philosophers of the 12th century.

To Al-Ghazali, music practice meant first and foremost listening to music, singing or recitation of poetry. He does not touch the process of music making as a productive act nor discuss musical concepts. His categories of music are limited to a few contextual determinations such as the

- pilgrims' songs,
- warriors' songs,
- recitation of *rajaz* verses,
- lamentation, and
- music for festive joy.

To him, place, time and associates of music listening are the deciding criteria for its permissibility. In most cases, he narrows the acceptable musical space down to music listening among people of the same faith within the following rules:

“To conclude: in holding these assemblies, regard must be had to time and place, and that no spectators come from unworthy motives. Those who participate in them should sit in silence, not looking at one another, but keeping their heads bent, as at prayer, and concentrating their minds on God. Each should watch for whatever may be revealed to his own heart, and not make any movements from mere self-conscious impulse. But if any one of them stands up in a state of genuine ecstasy all the rest should stand up with him, and if any one's turban fall off the others should also lay their turbans down.” (Al-Ghazali, 2009: 51-52).

Though Al-Ghazali's writing on Music and Singing is often taken as a defence of music practice, in reality, Al-Ghazali's interpretation is forbidding music in a more strict way by prescribing places, times and companies, than for example Mālik bin Anas (c. 711 – 795), the teacher of Al-Shafi'i (767–820)ⁱⁱ or before him Abū Ḥanīfah (699 — 767)ⁱⁱⁱ, founder of the Sunni Hanafi school of fiqh^{iv}, who deny the meaningfulness of music and singing in general thus being in clear contrast to social practice.

The obvious difference between the state of an unconditionally demanded mind and the real daily routine apart from religious life relativated the impact of generalisms such as given by Mālik bin Anas and his followers over the periods of time.

In contrast with it, Al-Ghazali's categorisation of music according to context and function sustained over the centuries and has still a strong impact on cultures practicing Islam. The specification and detailed discussion did obviously not allow for regular exceptions. Therefore, the discussion of his writings is crucial to the understanding of musical embodiments within affected cultures. An early example are Tirmidhī's (824–892)^v collections of *hadiths*, which are re-interpreted in the light of Al-Ghazali's writings. They include detailed descriptions of what happens inside the body while being emotionally moved (Kugle, 2007: 236). Tirmidhī believes that in any human personality the perception of pleasure by the soul that is caused by desire, shapes an impression that rises from the soul's seat, the belly, upward and imprints its dark smoke from fire upon the clean nature that has its centre in the heart. Kugle calls it "a moral reality played out through the drama of human anatomy".

The Echo of Al-Ghazali's Writings in Present-Day Malaysia

Interpretations of philosophical thoughts like those of Tirmidhī increased the popularity of Al-Ghazali's writings among Muslim communities in times of external pressure such as colonisation, civil war, permanent political or economic pressure, and finally in the refined network of a global society devoted to unlimited information and multi-sensual experiences of a variety of cultures.

Malaysia, a multi-cultural and multi-religious country, faces various types of external pressure and internal tension caused through a specific arrangement of protectionism in result of its national history and its adherence to the implemented system of power that is concentrated in the hands of the Malay upper class who are all Muslims by law. The continuity of this system, therefore, depends on the credibility of its attributes, of which music and singing is a quite important one. Other groups of the society such as Chinese, Indians, and many small communities of indigenous people populating Peninsular Malaysia, Sabah and Sarawak, are important target groups as well. This double function in demonstrating philosophical leadership complicates the situation, thus at the margins of each part of the society, radicalisation and exaggeration takes place.

The central category of Al-Ghazali's thoughts that sustains in Malaysia is the 'permissibility' of music and singing.

Most basically, all philosophical thoughts regarding the permissibility of music and singing interpreted in speeches, informal talks or mostly temporary public statements are definitely made from the position of a male Muslim whose main goal is to become an excellent disciple. From this perspective, another basic division is made between the way of perceiving music and singing as something one listen to or something one listen to and looking at. The visual aspect seems to be very important in terms of a decision on permissibility. Further, it is a difference if one listens to or looks at unbearded men or at women (Al Ghazali, 2009: 30-39). This, at the same time, excludes the person who decides on permissibility from any kind of music and singing with a very few exceptions. Further, the statement suggests that unbearded men could have an impact on an emotional state, which might reveal an underlying tendency to occasionally deal with pedophilic or homosexual practice in social reality. Both practices are seen as highly sinful. Relating music and singing to that topic may, therefore, have a similarly underlying effect on their perception.

Women – that is not surprising – are seen as mere property, sexual object and characterised by a personality that may insult when applied on men. A man might have a special relation to them if they are married to him or if they are slave-girls owned by him personally.

In today's Malaysian society, such a perspective is fairly outdated though fundamentals in dealing with women remain, especially with regard to music and singing.

Further key concepts are looked at in the following section.

Religious Categories Regarding Music Effects and their Application in Malaysian Musical Life Ecstasy (wajd)

We find 48 entries on ecstasy in Al-Ghazali's essay on music and singing. Ecstasy as a category of philosophical thinking is related to the connection between body and soul, which is from the viewpoint stated by Al-Ghazali a field of discussion with only few facts which may lead to reasonable decisions (Wilms, 1966: 149-150)^{vi}. His most related definition is given in his statements: "Ecstasy is truth. It is what grows up out of the abundance of the love of God Most High and out of sincerity in desiring Him..." (Al-Ghazali, 2009: 89).

Shortly later he summarises: “And everything that is experienced (*yūjadu*) as a consequence of Hearing, because of Hearing in the soul, is ecstasy (*wajd*).”; “So dread and humility are ecstasy”; ”Ecstasy sometimes causes revelations and admonitions” (ibid: 90).

Al-Ghazali goes into details of cases. He quotes from his contemporaries as well as from his teachers in differentiated ways. For example, he says about Sahl “His ecstasy was abiding and his thirst enduring and his drinking continuous, inasmuch as Hearing had no effect in increasing his ecstasy”. Then, he is citing Al-Junayd as following: “Defect of ecstasy does not hurt when there is abundance of science, and abundance of science is more powerful than abundance of ecstasy” (ibid: 113). In conclusion of this example he defines a hierarchy of qualities one aims at, which was influencing a vast amount of scholars following him. He is explaining the immediate effects of singing compared to recited words: “Then know that singing is more powerful than the Qur'an in arousing to ecstasy for seven reasons” (ibid: 95). In his detailed debate on the seven reasons mentioned, he again constructs hierarchies of permissibility as for example in the following statement: “The division of ecstasy into that which can be made manifest and that which cannot be made manifest is now clear.

Then know also that ecstasy (*wajd*) is divided into that which itself attacks and that which is forced affecting of ecstasy, and that is called affecting ecstasy (*tawājud*)” (ibid: 87). Al-Ghazali considers the second case of being blameworthy. Some appearances of ecstasy, he assigns to the blameworthy and – depending on the participating associates – to the praiseworthy. In general he is contemptuous of the following: “It is reasonable to suppose that ecstasy may overcome one so that he will tear his garment and yet not know it from the force of the intoxication of ecstasy which is on him” (ibid: 116). But speaking about the effect of a recitation performed by Abū al-Husayn al Nūrī of verses written by Adī bin al-Ruqā, he comments: “So he said, and there did not remain one of the people but rose and constrained himself in ecstasy. And this ecstasy did not result to them from the science in which they were wading, though science is earnestness and truth” (ibid: 98). In other cases he laughs at specific cases, as for instance in the following case: “And this goes so far that ecstasy sometimes overcomes a Persian at verses in Arabic, for some Arabic words correspond to Persian words; so he understands from them another meaning” (ibid: 42).

Ecstasy in the expression of Malaysian music performers is – considering this background – a multi-symbolic act. If demonstrated by Malay or other Muslim performers, it is widely accepted in the context of mono-gender (only male or only female performers/audiences) and applying non-sexual text/context such as religious practice. We may find it in formal Dikir Barat, Silat, and in some representative dance music performances.

Ecstasy in other genres performed by mixed gender and with text/context emphasising physical desire such as love between man and woman, longing or lovesickness is rarely publicly encouraged. This conservative common sense lead to rebellion against the interpretation of music and singing implied. Some young Muslims radicalise traditionally accepted performances and provoke established mind sets. One example is the extremely sexualised appearance of Dikir Barat as described by Raja Halid (2011). The exaggerated graphic design of text and its audiovisual representation in video clips reflect the rigidness of the conservative counterpart.

On the other hand, non-Muslim performers do not have any similar relationship to ecstatic performances. The devotion to Indian dance, in itself an expression of religious love, or the virtuosity of the Chinese on musical instruments generate parallel cultural worlds with their own set of categorical effects that do not overlap each other.

Sin

The second important category connected to effects of music and singing is sin as a definite criterion of permissibility. Though sin leads consequently to forbidding, Al-Ghazali relativates sin according to its moral weight. He says: “...persistence in sport is a sin. And just as a little sin by persistence and continuance becomes a great sin, so some permitted things by continuance become little sins; and this case is like perseverance in following negroes and Abyssinians, and constant watching of their playing, for that is prohibited, although its beginning is not prohibited, since the Messenger of God did it” (ibid: 44).

While he amplifies the idea about the five accidents of permissibility, which are

- who produces music,
- which instruments are used,
- what is the content of poetry applied,

- who are the listeners,
- and as such, are these listeners of the commonalty of the creation;

he asks: "...or is it only unlawful where temptation is feared in the case of him who fears sin?" (ibid: 38). In this question, Al-Ghazali's ambivalent relation to sin becomes obvious. He indicates that those who call something sin feel themselves being sinful. Within this reasoning, he differs from his famous teachers Mālik bin Anas and Abū Hanifāh. Also, he mentions a similar approach by Al-Shāfi'ī (767-820) before he comments: "And as for Mālik bin Anas, he has forbidden singing....And as for Abū Hanifāh, he disliked it and made hearing singing a sin." (ibid: 2-3).

If looked at the concept of sin in present-day Malaysian culture and its relation to music and singing one can observe that there is a strong tendency to objectify sinful thinking and its articulation. Music, especially singing, is strictly evaluated as a carrier of text only. Musical instruments, regardless of the music played, are seen in a similar way as being sinful of different degrees in certain context. It is as if music itself would not have any content or as if this content is out of question.

In reaction to this approach, pure instrumental music as well as provocative text is used to create a subversive musical life within the Muslim community and beyond it in exchange with other religious communities. A clear example is the development of local modern Jazz in urban areas and of indie rock groups. But also the strong attachment of Chinese Malaysians to classical instrumental music is seen as an uprising against rigid ethic rules. Thus, being involved in any kind of these music genres has an additional meaning to their protagonists that may not be identified in the cultures in which these music genres originate.

It shows that the only culturally shared space in musical life of Malaysia might be music imported from Europe and the United States, which does not ethnically belong to any of the main groups living in Malaysia. At the same time, this shared space is morally devaluated by conservative followers of Al-Ghazali who may see it as a space of collecting "small sins".

Control

To avoid sin and give ecstasy – if not preventable – the right meaning, control is needed. Al-Ghazali explains first, to which attributes of ecstasy control could be related. Writing about men who desire a non-permitted woman – which means in his opinion not their wife or any slave-girl they owned – he states: "He to whom this description applies ought to put aside music and singing absolutely. For he over whom a passion has gained control applies all he hears to that passion" (ibid: 41). In contrast to it, he describes the right situation of permissibility as following: "So he over whose heart the love of God has control is reminded by the blackness of the hair on the temples of a like thing, the darkness of unbelief, and by the brightness of the cheek, of the light of Faith..." (ibid.).

However, to Al-Ghazali control is something that has to be taught intensely to inexperienced believers. About teaching control he says "then they might learn from him the control of the external through application, though they might be unable to imitate him in his becoming a model to them. And if their being present fell with other than people of this kind, they were with them with their bodies, but distant from them with their hearts and what is within" (ibid: 114). In Al-Ghazali's thoughts, music and singing is only practiced with a platonic relationship to its effects in teaching the inexperienced youth to devote themselves fully to the Faith. Thus music and singing is a tool to attract attention.

On the other hand, Al-Ghazali is strict in the use of the category 'control'. Different from other categories, he does not differentiate various degrees of control. He comments: "It is forbidden to most of the mankind, consisting of youths and those whom the lust of this world controls so that Music and Singing arouse in them only that which has control of their hearts, consisting of blameworthy qualities" (ibid: 120). To him control is a personal attribute that depends on age rather than on knowledge. While the youth is controlled by mental states, aged believers gain control over these states. He explains "If he is in the glow of youth, and this quality have more control over him than any other, then music and singing are unlawful to him equally whether the love of a particular individual have control of his heart or not" (ibid: 43).

The danger of ecstasy in terms of obtaining control is named by Al-Ghazali in a way that may scare attentively listeners to his thoughts or the current reader of his writings.

In one passage, he comments the vagueness of knowledge on what ecstasy causes in different souls as following “Ecstasy obtains control over two listeners to one verse, and one of them hits the mark and one fails, or both of them hit the mark, and yet they have understood two different meanings, contradictory to one another” (*ibid*: 65-66). Later he adds with regard to dancing and body movements “And as to the tearing up of garments, there is no indulgence for it except when the matter passes beyond the control of volition. ...Or he may know it, but he is like one who is constrained and unable to control himself” (*ibid*: 116).

Al-Ghazali’s interpretation of control echoes in the present-day Muslim society of Malaysia as a strict division of age groups among themselves and an admiration for exceptional maturity. A very clear example was a publicly broadcasted casting show to find the best male believer to promote the future cleric elite. Those candidates who convinced through their abstinence from music and singing were considered the most promising even in telephone voting.

In contrast to it, non-Muslim communities in Malaysia avoid gender as well as age divisions in their music practice. Large festivals are held to promote the unity among Chinese community members living all over the country. The diversity of age and gender in their orchestras, dance groups or choirs is held in high regard.

Again, these examples of music practice are not shared by all Malaysians and shape a further limitation in some recent efforts to culturally unify the population in their ideas on public musical life.

Fear

Fear is another category of importance as an effect of music and singing. Though fear is a secondary effect caused by ecstasy or its control over mental functions, it is currently seen as the primary reason to avoid music and singing among large parts of conservative believers. Al-Ghazali sets this strong motivation of abandoning music and singing in one row of many other emotional states, he says: “— or it may be referred to changings and states that are not from knowledge, but are such as longing and fear and grief and disquietude and joy and vexation and regret and expansion and contraction of the heart – these all are states which Hearing arouses or strengthens” (*ibid*: 77).

Also, he uses the category ‘fear’ to denote different levels of permissibility, he says: “so this indicates that the voice of women is not unlawful in the same way that the sound of pipes is unlawful, but only unlawful where there is fear of temptation” (*ibid*: 28). His disdain of pipes as musical instruments finds further progression in his explanation that: “The well recognized ideas of fear and grief and joy occur only in the case of that Hearing which proceeds from singing that has a meaning” (*ibid*: 85). For Al-Ghazali, meaning is only produced through text thus instrumental music is definitely excluded from having a meaning. Though this meaningless music might be tolerated in certain context, it is considered as something that has to be deemed beneath one’s proper moral conduct. Al-Ghazali quotes Al-Shāfi’ī’s thoughts on chess playing, which is similar to playing musical instruments: “It is not one of the customs of religious people and people of manly virtue”. This points to fear of evil“ (*ibid*: 48).

Further, Al-Ghazali operates the category of fear in the context of unconsciousness, when he asks “Or it is the speech of a lover who is not at the time debarred from his desire, and who does not fear the danger of eventually being debarred;” (*ibid*: 66).

This interpretation is supported of the translator Duncan Black McDonald, who wraps his comment into the shape of a poetic statement “Melodies of sensuous love come to express the worship of the Divine; musical phrases that speak the fear of man come to speak the awe of the Unknown” (McDonald, 2009: x).

Finally, Al-Ghazali names the highest fear known and brings it deliberately into the context of music and singing through its central position in his analysis. He writes about the death “there was no escape for any man from leaving his wealth and his children behind him, which are his two beloved things of this world, and leaving one of them to the other and abandoning both of them; so fear and perturbation overwhelm him” (Al-Ghazali, 2009: 96). Al-Ghazali’s appeal to the strong feeling of fear sustained over the centuries and is one of the most persistent ideas in dealing with music and singing in present Muslim communities of Malaysia. To serve its conservative customers, for example, the Malaysian internet channel Radio Islam Nusantara [Radio Programme of Muslims in Southeast Asia] is promoted as being a ‘safe’ channel. It is featuring no music, *nasyeed* [popular only male or only female group singing with mixed text structures] or advertisements.

There will be nothing to fear, parents as well as teachers may make use of the channel without having to worry about being eventually endangered by mental states caused through music and singing. The exaggeration of this kind of care causes a rebellion of sub-cultural quality. Especially young adults are attracted by the dangerous addiction to music listening and isolate themselves fearlessly from the norms of their immediate religious community. Following this way, some young adults are the few who explore other cultural spaces sharing their musical experiences with diverse social, ethnic and religious groups. However, the outbreak from their home culture is mostly not very long lasting and of temporary quality.

Sorrow

In contrast to the extrovert behaviour caused through fear, sorrow is focused on innermost issues of the believers' personalities. Al-Ghazali classifies sorrow into two types: "Sorrow is of two kinds, praiseworthy and blameworthy. The blameworthy is such as sorrow for what escapes...The sorrow that is praiseworthy is the sorrow of a man for his own shortcoming in matter of his religion and weeping for his sins" (ibid: 23). The praiseworthy type of sorrow is then cultivated to a degree that it harms its credibility. Performed sorrow is until recent times a widely discussed issue for its sheer frequency. Al-Ghazali, as usual, connects the expression of sorrow only with text thus denying the possibility to stir up sorrow through instrumental music. When explaining the role of preachers in exciting sorrow he remarks: "It is not unlawful for the preacher who has an agreeable voice that he should chant in the pulpit with melodies, poems that excite sorrow and soften the heart; nor that he should weep and strive to weep in order that he may attain by it to cause others to weep, and to stir up their sorrows" (ibid: 24).

Summarising, Al-Ghazali ascribes both fear and sorrow to ecstasy thus making music and singing responsible for the experience of mental disorder of those who do not understand to overcome their weakness. He says "...for white hair results from sorrow and fear, that is, ecstasy" (ibid: 90). In present-day Malaysia, members of the Muslim community try to cover their sorrow of what 'escapes' that includes the death of close relatives, the loss of belongings, lost opportunities or other misfortunes. They are limited in sharing their objectified sorrow. On the other hand, they perform self-incrimination in poetic expressions that includes the rejection of music and singing. Both elements of dealing with sorrow restrict the ability to communicate beyond the borders of their own community thus shaping an exclusive cultural space.

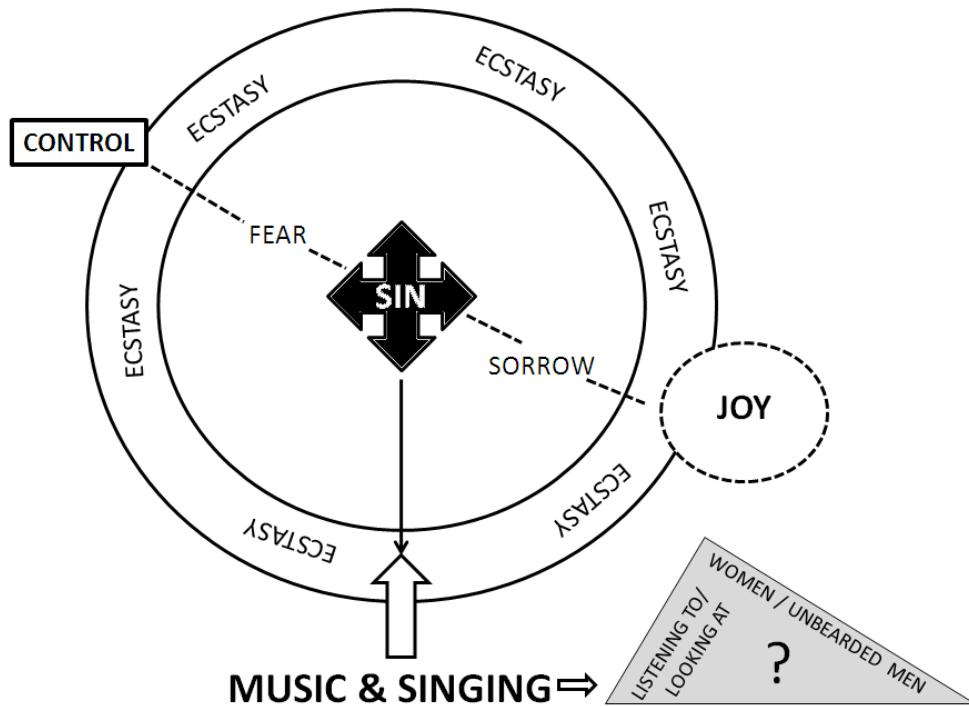
Joy

In contrast to the category "control", joy as an ecstatic expression is the most flexible. Al-Ghazali does not differentiate joy in its degree, but his list of events correlating with joy is revealing as a life calendar of few joyful moments that allow this special form of ecstasy. Before that, he subdivides music into five categories, namely pilgrims' songs, warriors' songs, recitation of *rajaz*^{vii} verses, lamentations, and music for joy. This division might not be mutually exclusive in all aspects. However, Al-Ghazali says about the last category "The fifth is Music and Singing on occasion of joy as an intensifier and arouser of joy. It is allowable if the joy is allowable, as singing on the days of festival and at a marriage and on the occasion of the arrival of one who has been away and on the occasion of a wedding feast and the first head-shaving and at the birth of a child and his circumcision and when his learning of the Mighty Qur'an is complete – all that is allowable for the sake of the manifestation of joy through it. And the reason of its being allowable is that some melodies stir up gladness and joy and emotion, and in whatever thing joy is allowable the stirring up of joy in that thing is allowable" (ibid: 24).

Only in connection with joy, Al-Ghazali suggests dance as being permissible, he comments: "...dancing is a cause of joy and liveliness. And the moving of every allowable joy is permissible; if it were unlawful 'Ā'ishah would not have looked on at the Abyssinians with the Messenger of God while they were 'yazfinūn'" (ibid: 114). This last line of reasoning has still a very strong impact on the Muslim community in Malaysia. Traditional dance in general is that part of performing art s that is at least suspicious. Dance as an expression of joy is unrestrictedly and widely welcome in the entire Malay world, except dance forms that contradict this principle. Al-Ghazali's remark on 'Ā'ishah who was observing the Abyssinians dancing with the Prophet himself had a great effect on the distinct position of one dance among the different local dance traditions, which is called *zapin* in Malaysia or *japin* in Indonesia. 'Yazfinūn' [to dance, moving feet forward and back] might be the original term that spread throughout the Arab world – especially with the help of traders from Yemen's Hadramaut – but only through Al-Ghazali's writings, this dance was awarded a sacrosanct position in the repertoire of various dances, of which some are still discussed as being too strongly attached to pre-Islamic belief systems, as for example *kuda kepang* or *ronggeng*.

The preference of social dance in the spectrum of performing arts within the country divides the Muslim community in Malaysia from the Malaysian Chinese, but may attach it to the Indian community. Here, the main contradiction is the religious content of Indian dances that do not traditionally allow for an interethnic exchange. The performance of an Indian dance drama by two young Malay performers in April 2011 (Gonzales, 2011) was a break through long lasting fossilized conventions and celebrated by progressive dance educators of all parts of the population.

Conclusion – The Consequences of Al-Ghazalis Impact on Musical Life in f Malaysia



Scheme 1: Construction of relationships between different categories of effects in relation to music and singing. The more left and above the better control is maintained. Music and singing on the other end of the ecstatic circle represents a tool of keeping ecstasy moving. To Al-Ghazali, most of today's music performances on public stages or distributed through mass media in Malaysia would be meaningless.

Al-Ghazali's impact on Musical Life in Malaysia results from the importance of his person in regional context and the high regard of written documents among Muslim scholars. His theory illustrated in the scheme above puts music and singing under the guidance of religious thoughts and qualifies them as tools to cause ecstasy of different categories and of different degrees. Ecstasy as being dangerously related to sinful acts is nurtured by music and singing through its impalpable possibility to apply them on already existing states of the human mind. In consequence of the interpretation of 'Music and Singing and its Effect upon the Heart and the Body', Malaysia as a multi-culturally constructed state is divided into mutually exclusive musical lives that are paralleling ethnic and religious borders.

Through a strict and in details hierarchized perception of the body, the role of gender and age, there is little space of overlapping and sharing performative experiences, which leads to a radicalisation and exaggeration of musical appropriations from different sources showing a strong tendency to transform and to partly re-invent social meanings and musical identities. The creation of a subversive performance culture and the usage of the World Wide Web with all its audiovisual facilities is only one obvious outcome within the Muslim community. Another outcome is the increasing consciousness of difference between all large ethnic and religious groups that calls for mutual acceptance rather than for an enforcement of Al-Ghazali's inheritance. Non-Muslim cultures co-existing within the country cannot be merged through reduction or re-definition of cultural values and meanings in order to transform religious concerns of the ruling group into one national construction. Thus, applicable concepts that overcome the narrowness and backward-looking policy towards music and singing are still to be waited for.

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ⁱ AFP 16 January, 2012, 12:32 pm.

ⁱⁱ Al Shafi'i (Abū 'Abdullāh Muhammad ibn Idrīs al-Shafi'ī, 767 – 820) is considered the founder of Islamic jurisprudence. He was active in juridical matters and his teaching eventually led to the Shafi'i school of *fiqh* (or Madh'hab) named after him, who is the dominant *fiqh* in Malaysia.

ⁱⁱⁱ He is regarded as one of the *Tabi'un*, the generation after the *Sahaba*, who were the companions of the Islamic prophet Muhammad.

^{iv} Islamic jurisprudence.

^v Tirmidhī (824–892) = Abū 'Īsá Muḥammad ibn 'Īsá ibn Sawrah ibn Mūsá ibn al-Ḍaḥḥāk al-Sulamī al-Sulamī al-Tirmidhī, was a collector of hadiths from Central Asia.

^{vi} According to Wilms, Al-Ghazali opposed the theory of the relationship between body and soul as executed in the reincarnation celebrated in Christianity. This relationship is an attribute of all beings; therefore, it cannot be a ‘Proprium Jesu’. Despite the theological essence that might be debatable, the acceptance of the unity of body and soul seems to be the striking point of departure of his reasoning on music and singing.

^{vii} Sung in a simple metre of the animal's footsteps, it transfixed weary travellers on their journey's end.